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SUBJECT: Nuba Mountains - Where are the Peace Dividends?

REF: a) Khartoum 2138, b) Khartoum 2140

Summary and Comment

¶1. This is the first of two cables prepared by a USAID team that visited South Kordofan State and Abyei from February 26 to March 8, 2006. The purpose of the mission was to a) monitor USAID Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance (USAID/DCHA) programs, b) assess the returns and transition process, c) examine protection issues, d) examine local issues, and e) identify potential additional areas of assistance to facilitate realization of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA).

¶2. In addition to the recommendations included in Ref A, the team recommends additional interventions to support returnee communities. Other recommendations include livelihood support involving water catchment (hafirs) and storage containers, conflict resolution through support to family tracing and unification initiatives, and civil society engagement in the implementation of the South Kordofan and Nuba Mountains protocol.

¶3. The absence of a state government appears to have resulted in backsliding on implementation of joint institutions. Governance issues appear to have more relevance in South Kordofan than the humanitarian conditions. Nevertheless, it is important to demonstrate peace dividends to the general population in order to assuage rising frustration levels.

¶4. The U.N. is introducing a new coordination structure under the Resident Coordinator's office. The first roll out of the new model is targeted at Kadugli, the South Kordofan State capital, in order to jump start humanitarian and recovery activities. End summary and comment.

Background

¶5. A USAID team visited Kadugli and Kauda from February 26 to March 5, 2006, to review the humanitarian situation in advance of the rainy season. The team consisted of staff from the USAID/Khartoum and USAID/Washington. The team's work should be seen in the context of the recently drafted

USAID Sudan strategy, which emphasizes support to the Three Areas, especially in assisting the implementation of the CPA, standing up of state governments, and assistance to returnees.

¶6. The political situation in general remains as reported in Ref A. There has been limited progress on the South Kordofan State constitution since December 2005. Hopes are high that a recent agreement to form a caretaker government by mid-March will be implemented. This will establish a structure allowing for day-to-day government operations while the current draft state constitution is discussed and finalized. In the absence of this governmental suprastructure, the parallel, Northern-dominated Government of National Unity (GNU) and Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) systems have remained in place. While neither system is performing particularly well, service delivery is conspicuously lacking in former SPLM areas. The team noted that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in former SPLM areas were engaging in costly activities supporting the parallel structures without consideration of the potential development and political implications. This is particularly relevant in the field of health, where organizations are moving ahead with plans concurred with by either GNU or SPLM authorities.

¶7. The team met with the USAID funded customary land security project in Kauda. Establishment of this mechanism should facilitate resolution of land-related issues once the regulatory suprastructure for Southern Kordofan is in place.

Returns - Desires, Expectations, and Frustrations

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¶8. The willingness to return to areas of origin is high. In interviews with potential returnees in the internally displaced persons (IDP) camps outside Khartoum, USAID staff were told that given the financial means for transport to areas of origin, they would return in spite of a known absence of basic services. Indeed, spontaneous returns continue. The Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (SRRC) reports that approximately 51,420 returnees have arrived in the Kauda area since November 2005. Between May and October, 2005, the U.N. Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) identified 12,687 returnees to the Nuba Mountains area and 27,892 transiting returnees. The U.N. World Food Program (WFP) distributions in February targeted 9,568 returnees. Undoubtedly the absence of organized returns precludes having completely accurate figures; however, the veracity of the numbers presented by SRRC is also questionable. In addition, there are unconfirmed reports of returnees going back to Khartoum due to lack of services and livelihood opportunities.

¶9. The team noted that returnees to the Nuba Mountains benefited from considerable host community support and requested livelihood support and transport assistance to return.

¶10. UNMIS Returns, Reintegration and Recovery unit (UNMIS-RRR) has plans for 28 way stations to be established throughout the transition areas and the south. Thus far only two of these way stations are functioning (Kosti and Malakal). The way stations are to be managed by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), or the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC). In order to discourage the pull factor inherent in a way station, a 72-hour time limit has been established. During this time returnees will be registered, provided water, cooking facilities, and health referrals. In addition, general information through a U.N. Children's Fund (UNICEF) information campaign is planned.

¶11. In Kauda, a way station managed by NRC is set to be operational at the end of March. In anticipation of potential tensions between the host population and the returnees, water points have been established both inside and outside of the way station. Discussions are ongoing as to how better to assist returnees who are arriving directly to their villages rather than via routes anticipated by the international community. The SRRC has recommended that mobile teams be used to conduct registration at the village level. It is unclear whether or not this approach will be undertaken.

¶12. Information about the conditions in areas of return is provided informally, increasing frustration among returnees upon arrival to their areas of origin. IDPs and returnees often obtain information about conditions in their areas of origin from their own networks. Information about the CPA is generally poor in the Nuba Mountains. The local population in the area is unaware of the special protocol.

¶13. UNMIS radio has not received its license to operate. UNICEF is developing radio spots and an information campaign to be managed by IOM to address mine risk awareness, HIV/AIDS, child protection, family reunification services, sexual- and gender-based violence, and some general information on the CPA. These UNICEF and IOM information mechanisms are not yet functioning. The reasons for this are unclear.

Protection - The Absence of Reporting

¶14. There is a disturbing low level of awareness, discussion, or reporting on protection issues in the Nuba Mountains. Although UNICEF and Save the Children/US (SC/US) are engaged in child protection issues such as family tracing and reunification, the USAID/DCHA team was not aware of any dialogue among NGOs regarding broader protection issues.

¶15. The importance of closure for conflict-affected

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communities should not be understated. SC/US has reunited 43 children with their families. Such activities facilitate community healing and generate support for peace initiatives.

Humanitarian and Transition Issues

¶16. There is broad consensus that access to water is the primary humanitarian need and significant potential conflict driver. In addition, health, access to free education, and economic and livelihoods opportunities beyond mere subsistence may be considered necessary in all return communities.

¶17. Access to water is the key issue in sustaining returns, promoting recovery and mitigating the potential for conflict. Limited water resources exacerbate tensions between sedentary/return communities and nomadic groups and generates community-level frustration currently targeted at the international community. Water access is significantly below SPHERE standards; however, existing donor resources would likely prove insufficient to meet those standards or the expectations of local populations.

¶18. Access to free education was largely identified as the second priority of return populations. A deficiency of trained qualified teachers, lack of a common curriculum due to absence of local government, and no agreement on the language of instruction present significant obstacles to ensuring quality education. Designation of language(s) of

instruction is significant for common quality assurance as well as to ensure economic opportunities for all groups of the population and maximize possible linkages to markets in north and south Sudan as well as in northern and sub-Saharan Africa. Current programs in former GOS and SPLM/A areas continue in parallel resulting in duplication of effort, risking fragmentation of the Nuba Mountains areas education system, and creating a potential driver of conflict.

¶19. Education is highly valued by the population. The critical issue from a practical and policy perspective is whether or not the curriculum will be taught in Arabic or English. The lack of a government or overarching political framework is a crucial factor in determining this issue. Irrespective of this, the general population desires access to free education in either Arabic or English. Expectations among the population for service delivery are extremely high and the largest pool of existing resources for capacity building and delivery are in Arabic, the local "lingua franca."

¶20. While access to health services remains uneven, particularly in the Kauda area, coordination of activities in this sector is poor. Both the Diocese of El Obeid and a German organization have constructed hospitals in the Kauda area located less than one hour apart. It appears that both facilities cover the same catchment area. Referral mechanisms or differences in services offered by these two institutions is unclear.

¶21. People also expressed a need for economic and livelihoods recovery. Basic infrastructure is a critical need. Road rehabilitation and construction would facilitate access to services and markets for newly established villages and create needed short-term employment for asset generation/resource accrual. Improved road conditions would ease access to markets, have definite impact on the local economy, and would serve to ease the tremendous workload that women in the Nuba Mountains face.

¶22. The impetus for most of the people who have returned to the Nuba Mountains to date was the 2002 ceasefire agreement. Most people have minimal knowledge of the CPA and those that do know of its existence are unaware of its contents.

New Coordination Structure to Support Governor's Office

¶23. The U.N. is introducing a new coordination structure

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throughout the country that will put some areas, such as Nuba Mountains, under the authority of the Resident Coordinator's office (in other areas, OCHA will continue to be the lead in coordination). The first Resident Coordinator's office will be in Kadugli, with plans to deploy immediately a consultant to work with the government to draw up an action plan for the State to identify the most urgent priorities, their costs, government and donor contributions, and the gaps. The work will be based on the 2005 Joint Assessment Mission (JAM) information, but as the U.N. pointed out to donors at a recent meeting, the JAM in the three areas is very incomplete, hence the need for the consultant. A two- to three-year plan is to be drawn up from this exercise.

Recommendations

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¶26. Establishment of the necessary infrastructures and capacity building to ensure delivery of health services are important for management of expectations: Support for coordination mechanisms to avoid duplication should be considered.

¶27. Civil society consultation process for implementation of the protocols for Southern Kordofan and the Nuba Mountains: Engaging local leaders, NGOs, and communities with information on the protocols and providing an opportunity for input is important. This would not only improve awareness and understanding of the CPA and protocols, but also enhance ownership of the process by the general population. Such an activity presents an opportunity to harness the population's cultural awareness toward realization that distinctiveness in the governance and social structures of the area.

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